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AUTHOR Hanson, Trudy L.
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ABSTRACT

After deciding which criteria a capstone course in a speech communication department should meet, faculty at West Texas A&M University decided to designate SCOM 401, Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism, as the capstone course. It is offered fall semester every year for juniors or seniors, and students are required to present their final projects, a 10-15 page critical essay, before a panel of speech communication professors who evaluate the presentation on a pass/fail basis. Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism is a writing intensive course; during the semester students write 6 practice essays, using 6 of the 10 critical methods presented. The practice essays involve the analysis of public speeches and popular culture artifacts. Before writing each practice essay, students discuss a critical method and read a sample essay that uses that method for analysis. Their final papers are reviewed by the instructor and revised prior to the final class meeting. The capstone course has helped give the curriculum a clear focus and a clearer picture of what the students are learning in the program. Currently, student portfolios are being contemplated in which each speech communication course will have a designated activity/assignment to be included in the portfolio. A course syllabus is attached. (NKA)

ED 461 130

The Capstone Course as Rhetorical Criticism

Trudy L. Hanson
Associate Professor, Speech Communication
West Texas A&M University
Art, Communication, and Theatre Department
WTAMU Box 60747, ACT Department
Canyon, TX 79016
email: thanson@mail.wtamu.edu
phone: 806-359-6103, fax: 806-651-2818

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A Paper Presented for the
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Atlanta, Georgia
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The Capstone Course as Rhetorical Criticism

Several years ago when our faculty were asked to evaluate the speech communication curriculum and designate a single course as the *capstone* course for our program, we decided that such a course must meet the following criteria:

- The course should require higher order thinking skills.
- The course should include activities and assignments that allowed students to demonstrate their competencies in listening, speaking, and writing.
- The course should include a public forum in which students would present their work before a panel of speech communication professors.
- The course should require students to synthesize and integrate the information gained from the speech communication curriculum

After reviewing our current course offerings at that time, we decided to designate SCOM 401 Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism as the capstone course. So far as our course rotation system is concerned, we decided to offer the Rhetorical Criticism course during the fall semester of every year. Currently, students are advised to enroll in SCOM 401 either in their junior or senior year. Students are required to present their final projects, which is a 10 to 15 page critical essay, before a panel of speech communication professors. The panel of professors evaluate the presentation on a pass/fail basis. If students do not exhibit competency in listening, speaking and writing, then the student is required to enroll in a speech communication course selected by the panel during the spring semester.

Information about the Course

Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism is a writing intensive course. During the course of

the semester, students write six practice essays of 5 to 7 pages, using six of the ten critical methods presented. The practice essays involve the analysis of public speeches and popular culture artifacts. This semester students have analyzed John F. Kennedy's Address to the Houston Ministerial Association, The Earl of Spencer's Eulogy of Princess Diana, the song, *Good-bye, Earl*, by the Dixie Chicks, the 2001 season finale of *West Wing*, Disney heroines in *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Mulan*, and a documentary film about Maya Lin, the 21-year-old artist who designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Before writing each practice essay, students discuss a critical method and read a sample essay that uses that method for analysis. By mid-semester, students submit a 3 to 4 page prospectus indicating what artifact they have selected for their final project, along with a discussion of the significance of the artifact, the method selected for analysis, and a reference list.

The Final Presentation

Students submit an initial draft of their final papers which are reviewed by the instructor and returned to the students for revision two weeks prior to the final class meeting. During the final week of classes, students give an oral presentation of their papers before the professors' panel. Before presenting these oral presentations, each student has a conference with the instructor in which they discuss the final project and its oral presentation. We make every effort to treat this presentation as if it were a presentation at an academic conference. These oral presentations are similar to the juries our colleagues in theatre schedule for their students each semester. Students must pass the oral presentation portion of the final project in order to be certified for graduation. Students submit the final version of their papers to the instructor on the final class day.

Benefits to Students

The introductory rhetorical criticism course allows us to assess the listening, writing, and speaking skills of our students. Additionally, the top papers in each class are submitted to either the Texas Speech Communication Association for presentation at its annual convention or to the Undergraduate Honors Conference of the Southern States Communication Association.

Benefits to the Speech Communication Program

The capstone course has helped give our curriculum a clear focus. We require all speech communication majors to take an 18 hour core which includes courses in interpersonal communication, intercultural or gender communication, communication theory, research methods, persuasion, as well as the introductory rhetorical criticism course. Each of those core classes provide information that serves as a basis for the writing intensive focus of the rhetorical criticism course. Our students also are asked to select one area of emphasis: applied communication, graduate school preparation, or speech performance for the other 18 hours required in this major. We are currently in the process of developing student portfolios. Each speech communication course will have a designated activity/assignment which students will include in their student portfolios. The student portfolio is introduced in the communication theory course (a 200 level class), an entry level course usually scheduled during students' sophomore year. The assessment that occurs in their oral presentations in the rhetorical criticism class, as well as the information provided in their portfolios, we hope will give us a clearer picture of what students are learning in our program.

SCOM 401 INTRODUCTION TO RHETORICAL CRITICISM

(3 Credit Hours)

Fall, 2001

Capstone Course in Speech Communication

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Trudy L. Hanson

OFFICE: Fine Arts 161

PHONE: 651-2800, 2799(dept. office) 359-6103 (home) e-mail: thanson@mail.wtamu.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Monday--11 to noon, 1 to 3 p.m.; Tuesday/Thursday--9 to 11:00 a.m., 1 to 3 p.m.; Wednesday--11 to noon; Friday by appointment

TEXTS:

Foss, S. K. (1996). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice, (2nd ed.)*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism is a writing intensive course which allows students to critically evaluate communicative messages of a variety of artifacts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course is designed to acquaint students with rhetorical criticism as a method of answering research questions in communication. Through discussing and applying critical methods, viewing videotapes of selected rhetorical artifacts, as well as writing seven original critical essays, students will:

1. Develop an understanding of how basic rhetorical factors related to text and context interact to produce persuasive goals.
2. Develop a critical perspective that will allow them to make informed judgments.
3. Improve their abilities to communicate effectively, especially in writing critical analyses.
4. Develop an appreciation for the contribution to understanding made by professional criticism.
5. Analyze popular culture artifacts using a rhetorical perspective.

WTAMU'S ADA POLICY:

West Texas A&M University seeks to provide reasonable accommodations for all qualified persons with disabilities. This University will adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required to afford equal educational opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to register with Disability Support Services and to contact the faculty member in a timely fashion to arrange for suitable accommodations.

REQUIRED ACTIVITIES:

1. Six original essays of criticism (3 to 5 pages in length).
After viewing a selected rhetorical artifact on videotape or listening to an audiotape and studying the text, students will write a critical analysis of the artifact using the assigned critical method. Papers will be due on Sept. 10, Sept. 17, Sept. 26, Oct. 5, Oct. 29, Nov. 16.

2. Mid-Term Exam--There will be one exam in this course. The exam will be given in the form of a "take-home" exam. Due Date: Oct. 8

3. Analysis of Critical Essays--Students will be assigned to discuss the critical essay found in the required text as part of class discussion. See attached analysis form for correct format to use in the oral presentation.

4. Term Project--Choosing from the methods studied during the semester, students will write a 10 page critical essay, analyzing a rhetorical artifact of their choosing. All topics must be approved by Dr. Hanson. A prospectus for your paper which discusses the artifact you have chosen, its significance, the methodology you will use and a bibliography (at least 10 sources that you plan to consult) is due **Nov. 5**. The first draft of your paper is due on **Nov. 21**. Final draft of paper is due on **Dec. 5**. The best papers submitted in this class will be considered for a panel presentation at the Texas Speech Communication Association Convention or the Southern States Communication Undergraduate Honors Conference.

GRADING POLICY:

Semester grades will be computed on the following basis:

60%--6 original essays (3 to 5 pages)

(Methods to be studied include NeoAristotelian, Generic, Feminist, Metaphoric, Narrative, Fantasy Theme, Pentadic, Cluster, Generative and Ideological.)

5% Class Discussion of Critical Essays

5% Mid-Term Exam

30%--Term Paper/Oral Presentation

The grading scale for this course is as follows: 90 to 100 an A, 80 to 89 a B, 70 to 79 a C, 60 to 69 a D, Below 60 an F.

POLICIES:

1. All papers must be typed (double spaced) with attention to correct form and grammar. Format of papers will follow that used in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001, 5th Edition.). You may check the APA website at www.apastyle.org for updates and the latest information on changes in APA style.

2. Attendance is expected at all classes.

3. Late papers CANNOT be accepted.

4. Students should follow the analysis form when presenting the assigned critical essay to the class. This critique should be presented in an interesting manner. DO NOT READ your analysis to us.

5. Be prepared to discuss your original essay in class on the day that each paper is due.

6. Each essay will be evaluated according to organization, style, mechanics, reasoning and analysis, evidence and documentation, and accuracy. A sample evaluation form is attached.

The format of the course will involve three steps for learning and applying each critical method studied. First, the critical method will be discussed, with key definitions of terms explained. Second, students will view a videotape of a selected artifact or listen to an audio version. From viewing the videotape, as well as from carefully analyzing the text, students will write a 3 to 5 page analysis. Analyzing selected critical essays by noted critics through class discussion will further familiarize the student with the application of the method being studied.

A specific outline of assignments is found on the following pages. Please note that this is a guideline. Dates and assignments may be altered to best fit the needs of the class. Since SCOM 401 is considered the "capstone" course for SCOM majors, students will present a 15 to 20 minute oral presentation based on their term project before a panel of communication professors during the final week of the course.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Activity/Assignment</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Aug. 27	Course Introduction	
Aug. 29	Discussion: Nature of Rhetorical Criticism	Chapters 1 and 2
Aug. 31	Non-graded Exercise: What Is Rhetoric?	
Sept. 3	Labor Day Holiday	
Sept. 5	Discussion of Neo-Aristotelian Criticism Critical Essay: Brown's essay (p. 51-58)	Chapter 3
Sept. 7	Rhetoric of Public Speaking Video: JFK at the Houston Ministerial Association	
Sept. 10	Paper: Analyze JFK's Address using the Neo-Aristotelian Method.	
Sept. 12	Discussion of Generic Criticism Critical Essay: Vande Berg's essay (pp. 238-259)	Chapter 4, 7
Sept. 14	Video: The Earl of Spencer's Eulogy of Lady Diana (Text provided) Text: Sen. Edward Kennedy's Eulogy of JFK, Junior	
Sept. 17	Paper: Analyze the Earl of Spencer's Eulogy or Edward Kennedy's tribute to his nephew to see how well it meets the criteria for the genre of eulogies.	
Sept. 19	Discussion of Feminist Criticism Critical Essay: Fredal's essay (pp. 175-180)	Chapter 6
Sept. 21	Rhetoric of Song	
Sept. 24	Audio: <i>Goodbye Earl</i> (Dixie Chicks)	
Sept. 26	Paper: Analyze the selected musical artifact using Feminist Criticism.	
Sept. 28	Discussion of Metaphoric Criticism Critical Essay: Huesca's essay (pp. 388-391)	Chapter 9
Oct. 1	Rhetoric of Television	

- Oct. 3 Video: *The West Wing*
- Oct. 5 **Paper: Analyze the metaphors present in the episode of *West Wing* using metaphoric criticism.**
- Oct. 8 **Mid-Term Exam due.**
- Oct. 10 and Oct. 12 NO CLASS (Dr. Hanson will be attending the TSCA Convention)
- Oct. 15 Discussion of Narrative Criticism Chapter 10
Critical Essay: Berdayes' essay (pp. 447-452)
- Oct. 17 Video: Professional Teller Syd Lieberman
- Oct. 19 Discussion of Fantasy Theme Criticism Chapter 5
Critical Essay: Huesca's essay (pp. 157-162)
- Oct. 22 Discussion of Generative Criticism Chapter 12
Critical Essay: Terrill's essay (pp. 509-530)
- Oct. 24 Rhetoric of Humor
- Oct. 26 Video clips: Disney Heroines (Belle, Mulan, Ariel)
- Oct. 29 **Paper: Analyze the Disney heroines viewed by using one of these methods: narrative, fantasy theme, or generative**
- Oct. 31 and Nov. 2 NO CLASS (Dr. Hanson will be attending the NCA Convention)
- Nov. 5 Discussion of Pentadic Criticism Chapter 11
Critical Essay: Ling's essay (pp. 464-471)
Prospectus for Final Project is due
- Nov. 7 Discussion of Cluster Criticism Chapter 4
Critical Essay: Reid's essay (pp. 81-100)
- Nov. 9 Discussion of Ideological Criticism Chapter 8
Critical Essay: Gillam's essay (pp. 346-353)
- Nov. 12 Rhetoric of Film
Video: Documentary, *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*
- Nov. 14 Video: Documentary, *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision*
- Nov. 16 **Paper: Analyze the documentary film *Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision* using one of the following methods: pentadic criticism, cluster criticism, or ideological criticism.**
- Nov. 19 Conferences with Dr. Hanson
- Nov. 20 (Tuesday) Conferences with Dr. Hanson

- Nov. 21 **First drafts of final projects are due today. Class will not meet.**
- Nov. 26 Course Evaluation /First drafts of final projects will be returned
- Nov. 28 **Oral Presentations (in front of professors' panel)**
Remember to provide printed outlines of your presentation for all class members, as well as the judging panel.
- Nov. 30 **Oral Presentation (in front of professors' panel)**
- Dec. 3 **Oral Presentations (in front of professors' panel)**
- Dec. 5 **Oral Presentations (in front of professors' panel)**
Final Revisions of your semester projects are due. Please turn in both your first draft and the final revision.

Please plan to stop by my office and pick up your paper by Dec. 11. Those papers selected for submission to the SSCA Honors Conference must be received by the program planner by Dec. 14.

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INTRODUCTORY ASSIGNMENT

YOU WILL WRITE A 2-PAGE PAPER THAT ANSWERS THE QUESTION, "WHAT DO PEOPLE SAY ABOUT 'RHETORIC'?"

PROCEDURE:

1. In two pages you are to **DESCRIBE** what you have heard people say about rhetoric. By "rhetoric," we are referring to the art or practice of speaking that goes by that title. Begin by describing what you have heard others say about what rhetoric is--of what it consists, how it is used, what value (if any) it has, what it is like, to what it is related. You may need to ask some people--friends and neighbors--in order to get some notion of what others are thinking. Don't worry about whether or not these opinions are right or wrong, informed or uninformed--just report what you have heard.
2. The second step is to **INTERPRET** these different opinions about the art or practice of rhetoric. Why do people say these things? What is it about the art or practice of rhetoric that leads them to think of it in these ways? Or is there something in the background of the respondents (education, values, training) that might lead them to think about rhetoric in the way that you have reported. Be sure to provide evidence for why you think people react to the term *rhetoric* in the way that they do.
3. The third step is to **EVALUATE** the different opinions about rhetoric and the reasons why people hold them. In order to evaluate something, you must have some standard or some set of criteria by which to do the evaluating. Evaluation implies judgment, and in order to judge fairly you must clearly state the standards of judgment. As your standard criteria, use what you understand rhetoric to be. Using what you know or believe rhetoric to be, compare what others have said with what you know. How do the two sets of opinions compare? Show how what others think is either adequate or inadequate when applied to your evaluating criteria. Draw some conclusions about how well people in our society understand the term *rhetoric* and what it entails.

There are three steps in all acts of criticism: description, interpretation, and evaluation. By writing a 2-page analysis, devoting one paragraph to each of the steps listed, you have begun the process of becoming a critic!

ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL ESSAYS

For the assigned essay, students will answer the following questions:

1. What research question is asked in the essay?
2. What method of criticism does this critic use? Does the writer explain the methodology?
3. Was the method clearly and competently applied to the data? (Give examples.)
4. What knowledge did you gain about rhetoric from reading this criticism?
5. Evaluate the format of the critical essay. Check and see if the following items are present:
 - ☐ Introduction
 - ☐ Description of artifact
 - ☐ Description of critical method
 - ☐ Report of finding of the analysis
 - ☐ Evaluation of the artifact
 - ☐ Contribution to the study of rhetorical theory
6. Is this a good or a poor example of the use of this method of criticism? (Be prepared to justify your answer.)

ESSAY EVALUATION

ORGANIZATION (20 Points)

Complete introduction: clear attention step, thesis overview

Transitions tie arguments together and reassert thesis

Conclusion summarizes arguments, re-establishes thesis, and ends paper smoothly and compellingly

STYLE (20 Points)

Language evinces clarity, correctness, propriety, and economy

Connotative and denotative language used appropriately

Linguistic fallacies avoided

MECHANICS (20 Points)

Sentence and paragraph construction at appropriate level

Mastery of punctuation evident, errors avoided

Appropriate control of spelling

REASONING AND ANALYSIS (10 points)

Arguments are clear and complete

Deductive assumptions explicit; inductive data evident and compelling

Claims are free of fallacies

EVIDENCE AND DOCUMENTATION (20 points)

Assertions backed by evidence, example, or explanation

Documentation adheres to APA Style Manual

Sources meet general tests of evidence: competence, recency, relevancy, sufficiency, and consistency with other sources.

ACCURACY (10 points)

Claims demonstrate comprehension of lectures and readings

Interpretation and analysis of selected materials consistent with intent of original sources

COMMENTS:

Points: _____

Grade: _____



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Signature: <u>Trudy L. Hanson</u>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <u>Trudy L. Hanson, Associate Professor</u>	
Organization/Address: <u>WTAMU Box 60747</u> <u>ACT Dept.</u> <u>Canyon, TX 79016</u>	Telephone: <u>806-651-2800</u>	Fax: <u>806-651-2818</u>
	E-mail Address: <u>thanson@mail.wtamu.edu</u>	Date: <u>Jan. 31, 2002</u>

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